



# Hernando Cortez

A Story of  
The Spanish Conquest of Mexico.

BY R. M. BIRD.

## SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

This story opens the year after the landing of Cortez in Mexico. A young Spanish nobleman, Amador de Leste, arrives in Vera Cruz, looking for his kinsman, a knight Calavar, who is with Cortez. Amador interviews the Admiral, who tells him how the triumphs of Cortez have fired with jealousy the heart of Velasquez, Governor of Cuba, who sent him to conquer Mexico, and now the armies of Cortez and Narvaez, sent by Velasquez, are about to fight. A mysterious Moor, taken prisoner by the Spaniards, is sent with what is understood to be his boy to Gen. Narvaez. Amador sets out to find his kinsman, and is joined by a Secretary sent by the Admiral to guide him. The Secretary and Amador overtake a cavalcade on the way to Narvaez. Amador, in the course of the journey, takes strong exception to the cruelty of the leader, Salvatierra, toward the Moor and his child, and they are about to fight, when Salvatierra acknowledges that he is wrong. At Zempoala Narvaez is found. Botello, a reputed magician, is brought before him and questioned about Cortez, with whom he belongs. He is defiant and mysterious, and awes though at the same time angers Narvaez by his answers.

## CHAPTER VII.

The angry impetuosity with which Narvaez was about to continue the conference was interrupted by the impatience of the novice. He had listened with much disgust both to the mystic jargon of the soldier and the idle demands and bravadoes of the General. The interest with which he discovered how short a distance separated him from his kinsman was increased to an irresistible excitement, when he heard the title with which, as the Admiral had told him, the knight was distinguished among the invaders, on the lips of Botello. Rising therefore abruptly he said:

"Senor Narvaez, I have to beg your pardon, if, in my own impatience to be satisfied in a matter which I have much at heart, I am somewhat blind to the importance of this present controversy. If your excellency will do me the favor to examine the letters of the Admiral, you will discover that it is not so much my purpose to lay claim to your hospitality and entertainment, the proffer of which I acknowledge with much gratitude, as to request your permission to pass through the lines of your army, to join my kinsman the knight Calavar.

"Understanding, therefore, from the words of this lunatic, or enchanter, whichever he may be, that I am within the short distance of a league from my good knight, to whom all my allegiance is due, I see not wherefore I should not proceed to join him forthwith, instead of wasting the night in slumber. I must, therefore, crave of your excellency to grant me, to the camp of the senor Cortez, a guide, to whom I will, with my life and honor,

guarantee a safe return; or such instructions concerning my route, as will enable me to proceed alone—that is to say, with my attendants."

The effect of this interruption and unexpected demand, on the countenances of all, was remarkable enough. The cavaliers present stared at the novice with amazement, and even a sort of dismay; and the secretary Fabueno, looking by chance at the Capt. Salvatierra, observed the visage of this worthy suddenly illuminated by a grin of delight.

As for the General himself, nothing could be more unfeigned than his surprise, nothing more unquestionable than the displeasure which instantly began to darken his visage. He rose, thrust his hand into his belt, as if to give his fingers something to gripe, and drawing himself to his full height, said haughtily and severely:

"When I invited the cavalier De Leste to share the shelter of this temple, I did not think I received a friend of the traitor Cortez or of any of his people; nor did I dream an adherent of this outlaw would dare to beard me at my headquarters with so rash and audacious a request!"

"The senor Narvaez has then to learn," said Amador, with a degree of moderation that could only be produced by a remembrance of his engagement to the Admiral, and his promise to the secretary not causelessly to provoke the anger of the General,—"but nevertheless with unchanging decision, that if I boast not to be the friend of Cortez, whom you call a traitor, I avouch myself to be very much the creature of mine own will; and that if I cannot be termed the adherent of an outlaw, I am at least a Spanish hidalgo, bent on the prosecution of my designs, and making requests more as the ceremonies of courtesy, than the tribute of humility.

"I will claim nothing more of your excellency than your excellency is, without claim, inclined to grant; and allowing therefore that you invited me to your lodgings under a mistaken apprehension of my character, I will straightway release you from the obligation, only previously desiring of your excellency to reconsider your expressions, wherein, as I think, was an innuendo highly unjust and offensive."

"Now, by heaven!" exclaimed the Biscayan, with all the irascibility of his race and the arrogant pride of his station, "I have happened upon a strange day, when a vagabond esquire, wandering through my jurisdiction, asks my permission to throw himself into the arms of my enemy; and when I admonish him a little of his rashness, rebukes me with insult and defiance!"

"A very strange day, indeed!" muttered a voice among the cavaliers, in which Amador, had he not been too much occupied with other considerations, might have recognized the tones of Salvatierra.

"Biscayan!" said he, with an eye of fire, "I have given you all the respect which, as a Governor's Governor and a Captain's Captain, you had a right to demand; I have also done you the homage

of a guest to his host, and of a gentleman to a reputed hidalgo; but neither as a governor nor commander, neither as a host nor a nobleman, have you the privilege to offend with impunity, or to insult without being called to a reckoning."

"Is this another madman of the stock of Calavar, that the silly Admiral hath sent me?" cried the infuriated leader, snatching up a sword from the table, and advancing upon the novice.

"Senor Panfilo!" cried Amador, confronting the General, and waving his hand with dignity, "unless thou force me by thine own violence, I cannot draw my sword upon thee on thine own floor, not even although thou add to thy wrongs a sarcasm on my knight and kinsman. Nevertheless I fling this glove at thy feet, in token that if thou art as valiant as thou art ill-bred, as ready to repair as to inflict an injury, I will claim of thee, as soon as may suit thy convenience, to meet me with weapons, and to answer thy manifold indignities."

"Dios santísimo!" cried the commander, foaming with rage and stamping furiously on the floor. "What ho! swords and pike-men! shall I strike this galofero braggart with my own hands? Arrest him!"

"The blood of him that stays me, be on his own head!" said Amador, drawing his sword and striding to the entrance. "I will remember thee, uncourteous cavalier when I see thee in a fitter place."

The arm of the Governor had been arrested by Duero; and in the confusion of the moment, though the door of the tower was instantly beset by a dozen gaping attendants, Don Amador would doubtless have passed through them without detention, notwithstanding the furious commands of Narvaez. But at the moment, when, as he waved his sword menacingly, the hesitating satellites seemed parting before him, Salvatierra stepped nimble behind, and suddenly seizing his outstretched arm, and calling to the guards at the same time, in an instant Don Amador was disarmed and a prisoner. His rage was for a moment unspeakable; but it did not render him incapable of observing the faithful boldness of the secretary.

"Senor General!" cried Lorenzo, though with a stammering voice, "if your excellency will read this letter to the end, your excellency will find my master recommends Don Amador as of a most noble and lofty family, and, at this moment, raised above arrest and detention, by being charged with authority from the Grand Master of Rhodes."

The only answer of the General was a scowl and a wave of the hand, which instantly left Fabueno in the predicament of the cavalier. He was seized, and before he could follow the example of his patron, and draw his saber, it was snatched from his inexperienced hand.

All this passed in a moment; and before the neophyte could give utterance to the indignation which choked him he was dragged, with Fabueno, from the sanctuary.

The dancers had fled from the terrace, the fire had smoldered away; but in the light of the moon, which shed a far lovelier radiance, Don Amador, as he was hurried to the steps, saw, in place of the gay cavaliers, a few sentries striding in front of the towers and among the artillery which frowned on either edge of the platform. Nevertheless, if his rage had left him inquisitive, he was not allowed time to indulge his observations. He was hurried down the steps, carried a few paces further, and instantly immured in the stone dwelling of some native chief, which, by the substitution of a door of plank for the cotton curtain, and other simple contrivances, had been easily converted into a prison.

In the meanwhile, the rage of the Gov-

ernor burned with a fury that was not much lessened by the remonstrances of his officers; and to the counsel of Duero—the personal secretary of Don Diego Velasquez, accompanying the expedition less as an adviser than as a spy over the General, and therefore necessarily held in some respect—he answered only with heat and sarcasm.

"I have ever found the senor Don Andres," he cried, without regarding the presence of Botello, "to be more friendly with the friends of Cortez than may seem fitting in the honorable and confidential secretary of Velasquez."

"I will not deny that such is my temper," said Duero; "nor will I conceal from you that such leniency springs less from affection than interest. Sure am I, that had your excellency, from the first, held out the arms of conciliation, instead of being arrayed against you in desperate hostility, the forces of Cortez would have been found enrolled under your own standard, and Cortez himself among the humblest and faithfulest of your Captains."

"While I doubt that effect," said the General sharply, "I cannot but be assured of the strength of Don Andres's interest, while I listen to the whispers of his enemies."

Duero colored, but replied calmly:

"It is not unknown to me that certain ill-advised persons have charged me with being under the influence of a secret compact with Cortez, formed before his appointment to the command of the first army of invasion, whereby I was to share a full third of the profits of his enterprise. Without pretending to show the improbability of such an agreement, I will, for an instant, allow your excellency to take it for granted, in order that your excellency may give me credit for my present disinterestedness, in doing all I can to ruin my colleague; in which I reckon, as no slight matter, taking every opportunity to decoy away his followers."

"If thou wilt show me in what manner submission to the whims and insults of this insolent boy could have detached any of the mutineers from Cortez, I will confess myself in error, and liberate him forthwith," said the General.

"The insult has been passed, the blow has been struck," said Duero gravely, "and unless your excellency chooses to

measure swords with him immediately after his liberation, nothing can be gained by such a step. I should rather counsel your excellency to have the prison watched with a double guard. But, in arresting him, you have, besides giving deep offense to your colleague, the Admiral, forever won the hate and hostility of the Knight of Rhodes; and when this is told him in the camp of Cortez, it will harden the hearts of all against us."

"When it is told in the camp of Cortez," said Narvaez, with a bitter smile, "it shall be with mine own lips; and if I hang not upon a tree, afterwards, the knight Calavar himself, it will be more out of regard to his madness, than to the dignity of his knighthood. I will attack the rebel to-morrow!"

"Your excellency is heated by anger,"

said Duero temperately; "or you would observe you have a follower of the rebel for a listener."

"Ay! Botello!" cried the General, with a laugh of scorn. "He will carry my counsels to Cortez when the cony carries food to the serpent, and the sick ox to the carrion crow. Hark, sirrah, thou hast read the fate of thy master. Will I attack him to-morrow?"

"Thou wilt not," said Botello, with an unmoved countenance.

"Hah!" cried Narvaez; "art thou so sure of this that thou wilt pledge thy head on the prophecy? Thou shalt live to be hanged at sunset, with thy old comrades for spectators."

"Heaven has written another history for to-morrow," said Botello, gravely; "and I have read that as closely as the page of

to-day; but what is for myself, is, and no man may know it: The fate in store for the vain pride and the quick anger, may, in part, be spoken."

"Sirrah," said Narvaez, "remember, that though the vain pride might overlook one so contemptible as thyself, the quick anger is not yet allayed; and if thou wilt not have me beat thee in the morning, proceed forthwith to discourse of our destinies."

"Blows shall be struck," said the magician, earnestly; "but whether upon my own head or another's, whether in this temple or another place, whether in the morning or in the evening, I am not permitted to divulge. Repent of thy sins; call in a confessor, and pray; for wrath cometh, and sorrow is behind! By the spirits that live in the stars, by the elves that dwell in stones and shrubs, by the virtues that are caged in matter where the ignorant man findeth naught but ignorance, have I been made acquainted with many things appertaining to thy fate, but not all. If thou wilt, I will speak thee things I am permitted."

"Speak, then," cried the General; "for whether thy knowledge be truth or lies, whether it come from the revelations of angels, or the diabolical instructions of fiends, I will listen without fear."

"Adonai Melech! under the heaven, and above the abyss,—with my hand on the cross, and the rosary in my bosom,—in Rome, near to the footsteps of His Holiness, and with one who was his favorite astrologer, studied I mine art; and there is nothing in it that is not blessed," said Botello, with a solemn enthusiasm, that made a deep impression upon all.—"Give me a staff, that I may draw the curtain from this loop," he continued.

The sword of a younger officer was instantly extended, the curtain removed, and the moon, climbing the blue hills of paradise, looked down into the apartment. The cavaliers stared at the astrologer and magician, for Botello was both, some with an unconcealed awe, and others, the General among the rest, with an endeavor at looks of contempt not in good character with the interest they betrayed in all his proceedings. He raised his eyes to the beautiful luminary,—enough to create by her mystic splendor the elements of superstition in the breast of a rhapsodist,—crossed himself devoutly twice or thrice, mumbled certain inexplicable words, and then said aloud, with a mournful emphasis:

"Wo to him that sits in the high place, when the moon shines from the house Allaha! But the time has not come; and I dare not speak the hour of its visitation."

"And what shall it advantage me to know my peril, if I have not such knowledge as may enable me to prevent it?" demanded Narvaez, with a frown.

"And what would it benefit thee to know the time of thy peril," said the astrologer, "when God has not given thee the power to avert it? What is written must be fulfilled; what is declared must be accomplished. Listen—the queen of night is in the 18th mansion; and under that influence discord is sown in the hearts of men, sedition comes to the earth, and conspiracy hatches under the green leaf."

The General turned quickly upon his officers and surveyed them with an eye of suspicion. They looked blankly one upon another, until Duero, laughing in a forced and unnatural manner, cried:

"Why should we listen to this madman, if we are so affected by his ravings? Senor General, you will straightway look upon us all as traitors!"

"There have been villains about us before," muttered the General, "but I will not take the moon's word for it; and the more especially that I must receive it through this man's interpretation."

"It is the influence, too, that is good



"I AM AT LEAST A SPANISH HIDALGO," SAID AMADOR.